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Some Reminiscences  
and Early Letters of  
Sidney Lanier

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George Herbert Clarke

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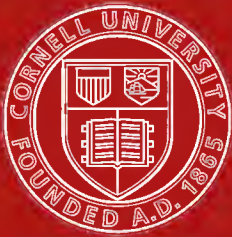
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BIRTH PLACE OF SIDNEY LANIER MACON, GA.



**Some Reminiscences  
and Early Letters of  
Sidney Lanier**



By  
**George Herbert Clarke**

With an Introduction by  
**Harry Stilwell Edwards**

Published under the auspices of the  
**Sidney Lanier Chapter of the  
United Daughters of  
the Confederacy**

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## Preface

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The following account of Sidney Lanier's earlier life was first published in *The Independent*, New York, November 8th, 1906, and is reproduced in a slightly enlarged form by permission of Dr. William Hayes Ward, Editor of that periodical and writer of the admirable Memorial prefaced to the complete edition of the *Poems*. The poem, *Life and Song*, on page 3, is used by permission of Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, and the youthful portrait by permission of Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Company and Professor Edwin Mims, in whose *Life of Sidney Lanier* it appears. The letter of which a page is reproduced in facsimile was lent by Mrs. W. A. Hopson, of Macon, Ga., by whose courtesy also I am enabled to quote the poem, *To G. H.*, and the passages that follow from the Lanier-Hopson correspondence. Mrs. Sidney Lanier, widow of the poet, kindly examined the original MS., and made several valuable corrections and suggestions. I am much indebted also to Mr. Harry Stilwell Edwards, for his thoughtful words of Introduction, and to Mr. C. E. Campbell, of Macon, whose memory and interest have been of constant service. I would recognize with gratitude the coöperation of all these friendly aiders.

The booklet is issued under the auspices of the Sidney Lanier Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and it is intended that a portion of the proceeds shall be devoted to Lanier memorial purposes under the control and direction of this Chapter.

G. H. C.

Macon, Ga., May, 1907.

## Life and Song

If life were caught by a clarionet,  
And a wild heart, throbbing in the reed,  
Should thrill its joy and trill its fret,  
And utter its heart in every deed,

Then would this breathing clarionet  
Type what the poet fain would be ;  
For none of the singers ever yet  
Has wholly lived his minstrelsy,

Or clearly sung his true, true thought,  
Or utterly bodied forth his life,  
Or out of life and song has wrought  
The perfect one of man and wife ;

Or lived and sung, that Life and Song  
Might each express the other's all,  
Careless if life or art were long  
Since both were one, to stand or fall :

So that the wonder struck the crowd,  
Who shouted it about the land :  
*His song was only living aloud,*  
*His work, a singing with his hand !*

—Sidney Lanier, 1868.

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## Introduction

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It is one of the mysteries that we in reality learn nothing vital from the poets except to realize. That which they touch within us is there awaiting the touch,—planted with the soul, in the soul. Or is it the soul?

They teach us, but they teach us to see farther and hear better. They awaken the understanding to its own deep-laid environment, and appeal to the perfection of the undreamed-of knowledge within us. Of the little world we inhabit they make a universe and open every window into an eternity of time and space. We learn without the poets, but without them we could never realize fully, that the soul is not imprisoned. We can find our way without them, but not the harbor.

Who are the poets? They are the men of the chisel, the brush, the viol and the pen whose work reveals us to ourselves. These, alone, knock at the door of our third nature, our third selves. For, if we are fashioned after God, made in His image, we are each three in one. When we know what is the third in the Holy Trinity, we shall know what is third in us. Shall we call it the Eternal Feminine? It will serve. We only know that it is at the foot of this throne the poet kneels.

It is easier with this term to realize the Motherhood in nature: to know that the color of the leaves, the blush and perfume of the rose, the whiteness of the lily, the song of the birds, the sunrise and the sunset, the solemn murmur of the tidal marsh, stars whose glittering silence is unheard music, are not elemental facts, but the expression of something behind,—of that which is the source of all things beautiful, tender, good, happy, exalted and peaceful; of the universal Mother whose hereditary lines are graven in us. Here is the poet's chosen home, the land of our half-dreamed dreams, the land toward which at some time every man and woman has yearned.

And its gateway lies in every soul.

What has this to do with the work that follows? This. The people who knew and loved him as little realized the greatness of Sidney Lanier and his mission as they did the writings on their own souls. "Is not this the Carpenter's

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son?" was not more naturally asked in the ages gone, than were the questions that surrounded the developing genius of our beloved townsman. Gentleman, musician; chaste, lovable, brave and generous? Yes: granted in a breath. A poet unequalled in America? Hardly. He was to teach us all better. When we learned to read our own hieroglyphics, Lanier's message needed no translation. It had been understood.

It fell to the writer of these lines to prepare, as junior editor of *The Macon Telegraph*, his home paper, Lanier's obituary a quarter of a century since. He had as little idea, with all his boyish admiration for a great man, of the real greatness of Lanier, as had the average citizen. It was only after the human voice annihilated space over a wire, a laboratory toy developed into the world's great illuminator, intricate sounds were written on a disc for reproduction, and wireless messages touched with consciousness the separated minds of men, that he fully realized the depth, the beauty, the goodness of one he was wont to meet upon the streets. Lanier's message had gone round the world and come back. It was the same message, but the man and the men who caught it better understood that while they slept this pale-faced comrade who had slept on the Virginia hills with the starlight in his eyes, had risen to hurl jewelled spears into the future and set the bounds of knowledge where they fell.

We are still picking up these jewels.

In the article that follows Professor Clarke has skilfully outlined Sidney Lanier in the environment that produced him. His reference to Macon is especially apt and charming, a history in few lines, delicately conveying a flavor of the Old South. His reference to Lanier betrays the student and the sympathetic and appreciative friend of the poet. The work, though short, becomes at once an important chapter in the world's history of Lanier yet to be gathered and bound.

HARRY STILWELL EDWARDS.

# Some Reminiscences and a Few Early Letters of Sidney Lanier



“Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,  
And did he stop and speak to you,  
And did you speak to him again?  
How strange it seems and new!”

ROBERT BROWNING: *Memorabilia*.

That the South can justly claim Edgar Poe for her own is doubtful enough. Even if the concrete facts largely favored such a claim, it is still true, as Professor Dowden declares, that “he would have differed little from his actual self had he been born on an Irish hillside or in a German forest.” Both Poe’s point of view and his output are so exceptional as to be virtually unique. He is not in verity a Southern poet, nor is he even unmistakably American. To paraphrase a brief but meaningful line from *The Bells*, its vagrant author is “all alone.” Probably of Irish descent on his father’s side; born in Boston of an English mother; brought up by a Scotch foster-father in Virginia; educated in England during five critical years of boyhood, and later at the University of Virginia and West Point; a wanderer from city to city, though most attracted by cosmopolitan New York; Poe seems to have had ample opportunity to become anything but a respectably representative American writer.

If Poe were *sui generis*, it is true in a sense that every poet and artist is so, yet, paradoxically enough, the flavor of soil and climate is peculiarly apparent in the work of the most catholic and universal of men. To be an American one must have State affiliation. To be a citizen of the world one must first be able and willing to live pretty

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intensely amid a specific local environment. For the world is made up of its own miniatures. And in Sidney Lanier's life and work there are ample evidences of his *habitat*. Unlike Timrod and Hayne, however, his fellow-singers, he was first of all a poet and afterward a Southerner, though the "afterward" follows hard upon. Such greatness as he achieved—and it is beginning to be seen that that greatness is real—was due to several contributory causes, which may yet all be traced to the single source of his personal temper as man and poet. He possessed, alone among Southern poets, the universal outlook, tending to the timeless and placeless; he was a student of life and of literature; he was unashamedly sincere; he was a master of wordcraft, in point of music, meanings, individualities and kinships. He had more than the melodic power of Poe, much of the ideality of Emerson, the human sympathy of Whitman, the book-love of Lowell and Longfellow. That his work is not, as a rule, finished; and that he was, as both poet and critic, too often oppressed and overborne by his own theories of art, must be recognized frankly, but it must be remembered as well that other and greater poets have theorized and experimented, and not always to their ultimate hurt as artists. When Lanier came into his own, he knew his high moment and yielded to it all he had and was. It is surely time to stand up and say of this man's *Sunrise* and *The Marshes of Glynn* that they are unsurpassed in sheer beauty of form and depth of insight among American poems.

For America was in him and the South was in him. The Georgia of his day was very proud and very conservative, and though Lanier reacted at times against both its "conceit," as he termed it, and its conservatism, yet



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he was a Georgian in heart and mind and body. The Macon in which he was born, February 3d, 1842, and which he called his home until the early seventies, was a quiet riverside town dreaming in the sunshine of middle Georgia, and much more interested in the graces and pleasures of reciprocal hospitality than in commercial enterprises of great pith and moment. Very jealously did the people observe the social and spiritual traditions of their distant British past, slowly adapting these to the warmer climate of Georgia, and taking on a clannishness of view and habit that, buried beneath a livelier outward being, still persists, in particular among the older families of the Macon of to-day. Indeed, Macon is one of the most characteristically Southern of all old Southern towns, foreign alike to the bustling modernness of Atlanta and Birmingham, and to the dual allegiances of Savannah and Nashville. Yet even here the life of the past has become objectively much modified, so that to walk out of the house or office of an alert young citizen into that of an ante-bellum gentleman is sometimes to feel a sense almost of bewilderment. The old South is still to be seen in the generous but wistful eyes of many noble men and women in Macon and kindred towns. It is there and will be there until they die. They are in it, and of it, and it is to them a holy place. And hardly less holy is the devotion of their children to the same ideal, only that to them it is an ideal less closely linked with personal memories and less likely, in their thought, to suffer serious impairment by contact with the things that are new.

In this stately old community on the river Ocmulgee, a town rambling up and down a range of little hills, liberally dowered with trees and lawns, and traversed by

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spacious streets, Sidney Lanier grew up, a gentle, honorable, sensitive Southern boy, strongly attached to his sister, Gertrude, now dead; and to his brother, Clifford, who still survives him. His father, Robert Sampson Lanier, has been described to me by several who knew him as among the most capable of office lawyers in old Macon, of fine physical presence, a well-connected and cultured man, and a true gentleman. His mother, Mary Jane Anderson, was the daughter of a Virginia planter, and a peculiarly though not narrowly religious woman. The family life was gracious and affectionate, and, among the children, playful. The girl sang at the piano, or romped in the garden of their High street home. The boys fished and hunted as well, and life ran very pleasantly.

Of Sidney's early schooling in the Bibb County Academy, several of his friends still living in Macon speak with clear memories. Mr. Charles E. Campbell, Colonel C. M. Wiley, and Messrs. C. P. Roberts (who now occupies the old Lanier home) and Mat R. Freeman were all among his mates. They unite in describing him as a singularly attractive boy, not so much in physical appearance as in an indescribable air of gentlemanhood, reminding one of Tennyson's characterization of Arthur Hallam in *In Memoriam*:

"Nor ever narrowness or spite,  
Or villain fancy fleeting by,  
Drew in the expression of an eye  
Where God and Nature met in light."

In truth, Lanier was a boy of normal fun and energy, but keyed to an exquisite personal dignity and purity, a boy whose conduct unerringly reflected his character, and who was earnestly admired and beloved by his young

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comrades. Then he loved as ardently in return, though a certain reticence forbade confidences passing beyond the give and take of boyhood. At tremulous peace with the inner self of his young visions, he awaited his time, half-conscious of he knew not what, living meanwhile an outward life of good cheer and hard work. Mr. Campbell, for his part, who was then and long thereafter very close to Lanier, though he did not anticipate his friend's literary fame, was always aware of him as "a knightly and clean-tongued" boy.

The affairs of the Academy were administered by George H. Hancock, afterward a professor in Wesleyan Female College, and by P. A. Strobel, as principals, assisted by Frederick Polhill, William Hill, and one Ryan, an Irish mathematician of original habits and temper. All of these men found in Lanier an accurate and persevering pupil, though fond of frolic and the minor sports. The Academy at length lost its best instructors, and most of its students were scattered among local teachers and tutors, while Lanier served for a time as clerk in the Macon post-office, and passed some three years or more of desultory study before entering Oglethorpe University, at Midway, Ga.

At this small Presbyterian college, which became defunct in 1872, Lanier developed rapidly on the intellectual and spiritual sides, later in life testifying to the fine influence exerted upon him by Prof. James Woodrow, of the chair of science. This man was, for his day, an advanced thinker and scholar, and was possessed also of a sunny humanness of temperament that went far to cover heretical lapses—lapses, no doubt, indifferently misunderstood by some of his colleagues and most of the college trustees. Lanier was greatly broadened by con-

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tact with Dr. Woodrow, and became a zestful reader and explorer in several departments of study. His flute practice, too, begun in the Academy days, continued to express the music within him. "He played directly and naturally from the first," says Mr. Campbell, "as one hardly conscious of effort or obstacle." His early interest in the flute seems to have been actively fostered by his friend Campbell and by C. K. Emmell, another friend who played admirably, and who gave their initial musical impulse to a number of Macon young men. Mr. Campbell was with Lanier when he bought his first "real" flute, a humble but reasonably effective instrument costing \$1.25. In Macon, indeed, nearly all of Lanier's closest friends were musical, and many are the memories of boyish concert meetings and moonlight serenades. Lanier soon developed an astonishing mastery over the flute, and might have played the Pied Piper of Hamelin when and where he would, for he could instantly charm any company into silence, tears or smiles. Music and romance were continually entering into him and escaping from him, in his life as on his lips. Several of the older ladies of Macon recall with affectionate appreciation his gracious manner toward women, and remember him as a dreamy lover of girls, who had, as varying symbols of a higher than human romance, "a sweetheart in every port."

Into the quiet happiness of these well-ordered days now broke the growling notes of war. Lanier, in common with every other young Southern man of courage and honor, heard the first shots with a curious feeling of mingled awe and exultation. Early in November, 1860, the people of Macon drew up a solemn statement of the wrongs of the South, and at midday of

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December 1st, "precisely at the hour the ordinance of secession passed in South Carolina," as John C. Butler narrates in his *History of Macon and Central Georgia*, "one hundred guns were fired in Macon amidst the ringing of bells and the shouts of the people. At night, a procession of fifteen hundred persons was formed, with banners and transparencies, and as they marched, another salute of one hundred guns was fired, while the bells kept up a lively ringing."

On January 19th, 1861, Georgia seceded, amid scenes of great excitement, and instantly there swept over the State the sounds of fiery orations, sighs of the fighting-passion, and calls for volunteers.

To these calls Lanier and many other Oglethorpe boys were among the first to respond. He was not long deceived in his own mind, it is true, concerning the probable outcome of the war—it early became to him the "Lost Cause"—yet he fought on with sure loyalty until captured and committed to prison at Point Lookout. From the horror and bloodiness of war Lanier's whole soul constantly revolted, but his duty was seen and done. Military service was with him a matter far less of physical enthusiasm than of uncalculating allegiance to a high idea. An anecdote told me by Mr. Campbell illustrates the repugnance felt by Lanier to realizing in his own career as a soldier the ordinary "privileges" of a survivor on a field of battle. It was after Chancellorsville, when Lanier, well-nigh in rags, was passing the corpse of a Federal private. Suddenly the neatness and newness of the dead man's shirt caught his eye. He hesitated for a moment, but, quickly deciding that he could not take the shirt, moved on. Within a few minutes he had repented his squeamishness, reminding himself of his sore need of

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a whole garment, and urging upon himself the strong probability that the Federal would not, under the circumstances, begrudge the transfer. By the time he had returned, however, he found to his chagrin that a less tender-conscienced mate had dexterously captured the shirt *en passant*.

From December 1st, 1861, to April, 1862, Lanier was a member of Mess Number Four of the Georgia Barracks, camping in Norfolk fair grounds, Virginia. This mess was the model one of the camp, having ten members distributed among eight bunks. One bunk was occupied by Lanier, another by C. K. Emmell, and a third by W. A. Hopson and C. E. Campbell. All of the ten men were on terms of intimacy and goodwill—at one time they constituted themselves a "Pickwick Club"—and took a peculiar pride in maintaining the cleanliness and attractiveness of their quarters. Mr. Campbell recalls how faithful and amiable Lanier was in the performance of the services required of him and in his helpfulness on the social side of the camp life. A good deal of flute playing went on, and there were many animated discussions concerning things military, musical and intellectual. Most of Lanier's experiences here, as a member of the Macon Volunteers, were reasonably pleasant, but when, in 1862, a change was made to Wilmington, N. C., a harder life began. After engaging in the week's conflict about Richmond, and some minor battles, the company was sent to Petersburg, and Lanier was able to obtain and enjoy a much needed rest. At Petersburg he first saw Lee, regarding him with a knightly reverence, as Sir Guyon or Sir Galahad his Arthur. Early in 1863 he was permitted a fortnight's furlough to be spent in Macon, and, upon his return,



SIDNEY LANIER IN 1866

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acted with his brother, Clifford, as a scout in Milligan's Corps in Virginia. This proved a not too arduous service, enlivened with many physical and social diversions. Headquarters were at Fort Boykin, and it was here that Lanier wrote the following poem to "G. H.," whose identity is revealed in the succeeding passages from letters written about the same time. She was a young Virginia girl whose grace and charm had won the hearts of both the young brothers and of their friend and comrade, Hopson, to whom Lanier pencilled the dim and faded copy from which I transcribe. She had written in a letter:

"Do you remember the 'Brown Bird,' in the *Drama of Exile*, whose song, as he sat on his tree in Paradise, was the last sound heard by Adam and Eve as they fled along the glare? So, friend, do I send my cry . . . across these broad stretches of moonlight . . ."

In a copy set down a year or two later in "the battered old ledger that received Mr. Lanier's hoards of poems, essays, quotations, and so on" (I use Mrs. Lanier's words), there are slight variations in the last line of the second stanza, and in the first line of the concluding stanza.

### To G. H.

Thou most rare Brown Bird on thine Eden-tree,  
All heaven-sweet to me  
Cometh thy song of love's deep loyalty  
And love's high royalty  
And love's sweet-pleading loneliness in thee.

Our one Star yonder uttereth forth her light,  
Her silver call to night,  
Who, wavering between the Dark and Bright,  
Oncometh with timid flight,  
Like one who hesitateth 'twixt wrong and right.

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O, never was a night so dark as I!  
But thou hast sent a sigh  
Of love, as a star would send a beam, to fly  
Downward from out the sky,  
And light a heart that's dark enough to die.

And so, O Bird, and so, thou Silver-Beam,  
Let me forever dream  
That I am Night, and thou a Star, whose stream  
Of light like love shall seem—  
Whose Love-light through my Dark shall ever gleam!

On the other side of the manuscript appear these words:

So Boyhood sets; comes Youth,  
A night of painful mists and dreams,  
That broods, 'till Love's exquisite truth,  
The Star of a morn-clear manhood, beams!

These verses were written by a young man of not quite twenty-two, during a romantic interlude in a life of growing anxiety and hardship. However tentative their execution, they show the genuineness of Lanier's feeling for life and nature. Amateur in expression, they are far from amateur in instinct, and the independent stanza, if cast in an apparently unrelated Hamlet-like strain, is yet a witness to the deeper seriousness of the poet's outlook and the high-bred quality of his humanity. This stanza, indeed, which serves to conclude *To—*, written during the same year at Fort Boykin, and published in the regular edition of Lanier's poems, was no doubt loosely appended to Mr. Hopson's copy of the present poem by way of a carried over comment or reference that would be understood and responded to by the poet's friend. In point of time and circumstance and similarity of phrasing it would seem that both poems were addressed to "G. H." Lanier characterizes that already published as "a little poem which sang itself

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through me the other day. 'Tis the first I've written in many years."

From the same place he wrote a letter to his friend Hopson, dated September 15th, 1863, from which I am at liberty to quote three of the most interesting paragraphs:

"I should have answered your kind letter long ago, but I have been indulging so liberally in chills and fever that I have had little leisure to devote to anything else. Your touching allusion to your own experiences in the chill line affected me almost to tears: I sympathized with you. Friend, when *thou* shookedst, *I* trembled; when *thou* wast feverish, *I* also burnt; and when *thou* perspiredst, *I*, in that selfsame moment (mine generally came about 11 A. M.) did sweat like the d——l. Verily, I have an idea of handing down to late posterity some fine dishes of juicy soul-meat, upon a poem for a dumb-waiter, the top shelf of which should be constructed "thus":

Oh, Life's a Fever and Death's a *chill!*  
'Tis a disease of which all men are ill;  
Earth for a Hospital surely was given—  
Hell's an eternal relapse: Health is Heaven!!

etc., etc., etc. And I *would* do it, by the Nine! only it looks menial and low to be shoving dumb-waiters up and down; even for Posterity, who, for all they say he's going to be so rich and lordly and refined, and all that, may, after all, turn out but a scurvy fellow that eats with his fingers; no better, if the truth was told, than we poor cooks and waiters of the present century.

How the Sublime and Ridiculous do nudge each other! They remind me of recruits trying to march in file; whichever one goes in front, the hindmost is certain

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to step on his heels; and one knows not whether to weep for the wounds received thereby, or to laugh at the awkwardness that caused them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ginna H. and I have become firm Soul-friends. She is a noble creature, and has the best-cultivated mind I've seen in a long time. I've initiated her into the beauties of Mrs. Browning and Robert B., together with Carlyle and Novalis; whereat she is in a perfect blaze of enthusiasm. She desires me to remember her very warmly to you, and to express to you her gratification that your only friend in Franklin of the female persuasion is cross-eyed and otherwise personally deficient; since so (she added) you will have less temptation to forget your friends in Surrey. Five young ladies visit the castle shortly, to remain some time; among them, Miss Alexander, the intimate of Ginna, reputed a perfect paragon of all that is lovely, etc. We anticipate a good time, and wish that you were here, very much, to make it better."

In the midsummer of 1864 Lanier was sent again to Wilmington, N. C., where he and his brother Clifford served for several months as signal officers on the vessels engaged in the dangerous business of running the blockade. A letter to Mr. Hopson, written from Smithville, N. C., August 24th of this year, presents a picturesque account of the life—military and social—he was then experiencing. Only two brief paragraphs are omitted.

"Ten or twelve Blockade-runners came into Port within a day or two after our arrival here, and were immediately placed in strict quarantine, it being reported that the Yellow Fever was raging in Bermuda, and

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even that there were cases on board some of the vessels. This proceeding somewhat damped our hopes at first, as we did not like the prospect of being assigned to duty in the Forts protecting this harbor, and awaiting the coming of Frost before we could proceed on our voyages. But, the vessels having developed no serious cause of alarm after riding out a Quarantine-term of fifteen days, are being released and allowed to discharge cargo and re-load. The 'Lilian' went out last night; and to-morrow night two of our party, Richardson and Langhorn, go out as passengers on the 'Mary Celeste,' to bring in two new steamers now ready at Bermuda. It is reported that there are a number of new blockaders in foreign ports awaiting Signal Operators to bring them in; and it is probable that, in the course of two or three weeks, a large majority of our party will sail from the Port for that purpose.

"I had a letter from that blessed Brown-eyed child yesterday, which I verily believe to be more beautiful than anything of the sort I ever saw. The letter was forwarded to me by Benson from Petersburg, she supposing me still there. I transcribe a part of it for your edification: 'I am glad that *you* see Mr. Hopson; but I do not forget that the moving of the Signal Corps precludes all hope of *my* soon seeing him again. I do not know how *he* regards it, but it is a very unpleasant fact to me, as you know, Mister Sid. By the way, did you deliver to him the package I sent, together with the *big* bundle of kind messages? etc., etc.' Certainly I did; didn't I, Hoppy?"

"With my usual good fortune, I have met here several of the kind friends that I made two years ago in Wilmington. They are spending the summer here, and

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have introduced me to all the nice people in this truly pleasant village. Insomuch that every day since I have been here various servants, bearing white-covered dishes of delicacies, or fruit, or books, with notes of compliments from the ladies, 'might have been seen' wending their way toward the Signal Quarters where I reside. I'm keeping up the Troubadour wandering about the world with a sword at my side, and a lute (or flute) slung on my back with the ribbon of my ladye-love!"

These letters and the succeeding one, sent out from the Marine Signal Office at Wilmington, October 21st, 1864, and which I am able to quote *in toto*, tell their own graphic story:

"I wish I knew how to thank you for this good letter that you send me, and which is the best I've ever seen from you. I could not help airing some of its beauties, and so sent copious extracts from it to our friend Ginna Hankins. I've been waiting to hear from her, that I might send you her comments thereon; but the diabolical mails are so slow that I cannot wait any longer, for fear you might think me under the waves.

"Cliff sailed last night on the Steam Ship 'Talisman' for Nassau. Telegrams from below this morning state that the vessel ran safely through the blockading fleet. She is owned by the 'Albion Trading Company,' E. Solomon, of New Orleans, partner and resident agent at this place. He was very intimate with our cousin, Major Lanier, of New Orleans, and entrusted to Cliff's care a large amount of bonds, besides giving him letters of introduction sufficient to insure his being well taken care of while at Nassau.

"I do not know what time I shall leave here. The imminent prospect of an attack on this place by the

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Yankees will probably induce the Blockading-firms to keep their vessels in port on the other side of the water, as far as possible. Were it not for this, I should get out very soon, in a week or so; since large numbers of new vessels are waiting at Nassau, Halifax and Bermuda for Pilots and Signal Officers.

"Several of our party are now out. Besides Cliff on the 'Talisman,' Beach went out on the 'Hope,' Livesay on the 'Helen,' Culpepper on the 'Will o' the Wisp,' Barnes on the 'Florie,' and Langhorne on the 'Stormy Petrel.' Nestor Richardson is at Bermuda recovering from the Yellow Fever. Eddie Godwin is Signal Officer on the privateer 'Chicamauga,' now lying at this port; and Leroy Godwin, his cousin, has just been ordered to the 'Tallahassee.' The latter will go out in a few days.

"Could you, by any possibility, run down here for a day or so? I have something very particular to consult you about. Oh, Himmel! If you knew! . . . . You'd come. Don't make yourself uneasy trying to guess it; you couldn't do it in a million years.

"I haven't the remotest idea where you are, and so shall send this to Benson. Write me as soon as you receive it, addressing 'care of Lt. Wilmer, Marine Signal Office, Wilmington, N. C.' I am staying in the Office, as clerk, with Frank Hyman, being invited to do so by Lt. W., who is a magnificent fellow. I am, Your Own S. C. L."

Only twelve days later the writer, then for the first time on active sea duty, was captured on board the "Lucy," bound for Bermuda, and was carried to Point Lookout. The four months he spent in prison were months of which the memory alone must have served

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I am Yours Truly  
J. J.



## Early Letters of Sidney Lanier

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to revolt many a more robust-bodied man than Lanier, but he is described by all who met and knew him in those miserable days, surrounded as he was by the shapes of foul disease and awful despair, as a comrade of almost incredible patience and cheer, and as a spirit of redeeming purity. He emerged at last with a sick and starved body, but with a stainless soul, and from this time dates the beginning of his physical end. His mother and his uncle, William Henry Anderson, his father's law partner, had died of tuberculosis, and, though prior to his imprisonment he had shown no trace of the disease, he was thereafter to yield more and more surely, if resistingly, to its long siege.

With the close of the war there came many breaks in Lanier's association with Macon and with his old friends, in whose ranks some serious gaps had already been made. Upon his return to his native town he found his father and sister living in Wesleyan College, together with his wife-to-be, Mary Day. Lanier's father and Mr. Day, who had lived in Wesleyan during the vacation, were permitted to remain with their daughters, all four as boarders, during the school term, and here their sons often visited them, Lanier once gathering his friends, the flutists, by special official warrant to give pleasure to Miss Day. I am informed that the two first met at the open, hospitable house of Mrs. John Lamar, near the Lanier home on High Street, in 1863. The marriage took place December 19th, 1867, in Christ Church, Macon, Rev. H. K. Rees officiating. Mr. Campbell procured the license and acted as groomsman. He tells me that Lanier insisted on dropping at this time his middle name, Clopton, which had doubtless been given him in memory of David L. Clopton, a kinsman

## Some Reminiscences and

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and a distinguished member of the United States Congress from Alabama. Perhaps Lanier's purpose in omitting it now was not a fully defined one, though possibly he felt the euphonious virtue of "Sidney Lanier," simply, as happier for him and for his work. For by this time he had a sure sense of his literary and musical powers, and an inward assurance of days of fulfilment, however remote. The ceremony itself was unmarred, but at the ensuing reception, held in the home of Mrs. James Monroe Ogden, a daughter of the Mrs. Lamar mentioned above, the gown of another daughter, one of the bridesmaids, caught fire from an open grate, the flame being almost instantly extinguished by watchful friends. The newly made Mrs. Lanier, who had already withdrawn, overcome with the exhaustion incident to an attack of malarial fever and to the excitement of the day, was fortunately spared the sight of this accident. Even when it was made known to her, she writes me, she was "still too weak to feel alarm, or even to realize the cruelty of having that bright evening made a blank for me."

Of the happiness of Lanier's after-life, despite the shadows of sickness and poverty, any adequate statement must speak positively. It was a life of energy; of growing power and performance; of ripening friendships with such men and women as Bayard Taylor, Gibson Peacock, Paul Hamilton Hayne, and Charlotte Cushman; and of that tender love for his bride—she was always his bride—that is breathed in the husband's simple tribute-verse, *My Springs*. Mr. Campbell tells of the naive, incredulous joy with which Lanier once showed him his newly-arrived son, expatiating in glowing style upon the delicate beauties of his form and

## Early Letters of Sidney Lanier

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features. And Lowell once said that the image of the poet's shining presence was among the kindest and friendliest in his memory. The success of his poem, *Corn*, first published in *Lippincott's* and of his Cantata for the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia, did much to redeem his spirit from the clogs and fardels of its bodily frame, and his late—too late—connection with Johns Hopkins gave him opportunity to fashion his critical ideas into lecture form. His appeal, however, it must always be remembered, is characteristically that of a poet, whether couched in critical form, or fictional, or melodic. A great heart, a noble mind, an exquisitely sensitive lover of humanity and art and God; he lived a life of growing strength in growing weakness, as the last of his poems must testify. It is the writer's hope that these brief reminiscences and gathered extracts may have served to express in some measure the spirit and direction of that life's seed-time in the self-contained old Macon of "before the war" and the missionary Macon of the Confederacy.



## The Sonnet

*UPON a day Apollo met the Muses and the Graces in sweet sport, mixed with earnest. Memory, the grave and noble mother of the Muses, was present likewise. Each of the fourteen spokē a line of verse. Apollo began, then each of the nine Muses sang her part; then the three Graces warbled, each in turn; and finally a low, sweet strain from Memory made a harmonious close. This was the first sonnet; and, mindful of its origin, all true poets take care to bid Apollo strike the key-note for them when they compose one, and to let Memory compress the pith and marrow of the sonnet into its last lines.*

—SIDNEY LANIER.













